



Athlete Profile (Local)

Ricky Harris – Pride Keeps Me Coming Back

Ricky Harris, a 38-year-old military veteran from Omaha, served in the Air Force from 1988 to 1991. He served his military tour at Anderson Air Force Base in Guam, and also at March Air Force Base in Riverside, Calif. "Serving in the military was a family thing and I wanted to carry out that tradition," Harris said. "My grandfather served in the Korean War and my father served in Vietnam." In 1992, just 10 minutes from the gates at Anderson Air Force Base, Harris was suddenly and seriously injured in an automobile accident, which left him paralyzed from the chest down.

During his rehabilitation at the VA Medical Center in St. Louis, Mo., an occupational therapist approached Harris with the idea of competing in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. "The therapist was a coach for the upcoming Games," Harris remembered. "He started bringing me weights to lift before I even made it out of the bed."

For Harris, participating in sports is a way of life. He ran track in junior high school and participated in many sports while in the service, including flag football. He said, "Competing in the Wheelchair Games made me look at things from a different perspective. It is not about what I can't do, but how I can do things differently now." For Harris, it is the great support he receives from family and friends that keeps him moving forward. The friends he met more than twenty years ago continue to be very supportive and that means a lot to him.

Harris has competed in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games a total of six times, bringing home many medals along the way. "Pride keeps me coming back," he said. "Mentally, I think I am just as good now as I was back then." In keeping with his love of track, in the 2008 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Omaha, Harris will compete in the 100, 200 and 400 meter track events. He also plans to compete in air guns and weightlifting. "Participating in the Games gives me a chance to get out and excel in track just like I did before I was injured," Harris said. "Being able to do this in a wheelchair makes it that much better. I just keep rolling along."

Harris says that he is excited to be competing in his hometown and looks forward to showing the Omaha community what wheelchair athletes can do. His reason for competing in wheelchair sports is simple. Harris puts it this way, "Because I can. There are a lot of veterans who probably shouldn't even be here today, but for the grace of God, we are. God gave me one more chance and I want to compete!"